



CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture

ISSN 1481-4374

Purdue University Press ©Purdue University

Volume 4 | (2002) Issue 3

Article 2

In Conversation with Itamar Even-Zohar about Literary and Culture Theory

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Recommended Citation

Sales Salvador, Dora. "In Conversation with Itamar Even-Zohar about Literary and Culture Theory." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 4.3 (2002): <<https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1162>>

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CLCWeb Volume 4 Issue 3 (September 2002) Article 2

Dora Sales Salvador,

"In Conversation with Itamar Even-Zohar about Literary and Culture Theory"

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol4/iss3/2>>

Contents of CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 4.3 (2002)

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Abstract: Dora Sales Salvador presents, in "In Conversation with Itamar Even-Zohar about Literary and Culture Theory," the text of an interview with literary and culture theoretician Itamar Even-Zohar (Tel Aviv University). In the interview, Sales Salvador discusses with Even-Zohar his polysystem theory, a framework that emerges from the wish to foster open dialogue between different trends in culture research. The discussion suggests that there are assumptions shared by practitioners of cultural studies and Even-Zohar's culture research framework he has been developing since 1993. At the same time, the discussion reveals that it is also necessary and perhaps much more important to be conscious and to be aware of the differences between the two frameworks. Even-Zohar's explanations present lucid accounts of the bases of the respective theoretical frameworks. Further, Even-Zohar responds to the Sales Salvador's queries about aspects of the reception of the polysystem theory in literary and culture scholarship, the role of translation studies in the context of the polysystem theory, aspects of knowledge transfer in humanities scholarship, and the need to consider what other areas of research and scholarship can provide.

Dora SALES SALVADOR

In Conversation with Itamar Even-Zohar about Literary and Culture Theory

Introduction

The following is an interview by Dora Sales Salvador (University Jaume I of Castellón) with literary and culture theorist Itamar Even-Zohar

<http://members.tripod.com/itamarez/ez_vita/ez-cv.htm> of Tel Aviv University. Even-Zohar's research, teaching, and publications are in culture research with focus on articulating and developing the polysystem theory in order to elucidate the dynamics and heterogeneity of culture. In this context, Even-Zohar concentrates on interactions between culture(s) and the processes of the "making" of culture(s) and cultural entities such as "nations" (see, e.g., Even-Zohar 1993, "The Role of Literature in the Making of the Nations of Europe" at

<http://www.tau.ac.il/~itamarez/papers/rol_lit.html>), 1993. Since his 1972 Ph.D. dissertation entitled *An Introduction to the Theory of Literary Translation* (Tel Aviv University), Even-Zohar has been developing a theoretical and methodological framework he terms "polysystem theory" and has concentrated on the application of the framework in the study of translation, intended to account for translation as a complex and dynamic activity governed by system relations rather than by a priori fixed parameters of comparative language capabilities. Subsequently, this notion has led to his studies on literary interference, understood in the context of intercultural relations. In this area of research his two main contributions are *Papers in Historical Poetics* (Tel Aviv University, 1978) and *Polysystem Studies (Poetics Today, 1990)*. Currently, Even-Zohar is preparing a volume of papers that will include updated versions of previous studies as well as new work on the theory of culture (for Even-Zohar's papers see <<http://www.tau.ac.il/~itamarez/papers/fac-dep.htm>> and <<http://members.tripod.com/itamarez/>>; for a selected bibliography including works in polysystem theory, see Totosy <<http://clcwebjournal.lib.purdue.edu/library/sysbib97.html>>). At Tel Aviv University since 1977, Even-Zohar is Professor of Poetics and Comparative Literature and his distinguished career includes the following appointments: Chair, Department of Poetics (1973-75 and 1977-81); Chair, Porter Institute for Poetics and Semiotics (1986-1992); Editor, *Poetics Today* (1987-1993); Editor, *Ha-Sifrut* (1976-1983), Bernstein Chair Professor of Translation Theory (1973-1982), Artzt Chair Professor of History of Literature (1982-1990); Porter Chair Professor of Semiotics and Literary Theory (1987-1993); and Founding Chair, The Shirley and Leslie Porter School of Cultural Studies (1986-1992). Since 1993 he has also been professor of the Tel Aviv University Culture Research Group and since 1995 he has served as Chair of the new Graduate Program in Culture Research and of the Unit for Culture Research. E-mail:

<itamarez@plato.tau.ac.il>.

Dora Sales Salvador: Reassessing the contributions of the last stage of Russian Formalism, that is, "dynamic functionalism," in your words, together with Czech structuralism and Tartu semiotics, the polysystem theory provides a framework aware of the contingencies of culture and power and its fluid dynamics, in the heterogeneity of any semiotic system. You fostered the necessity to define literature as a dynamic (poly)system, being, as any other semiotic organization, just a component within the larger polysystem of culture, thus acknowledging the cultural, social, historical, and ideological location of literature and any other cultural text as forms of cultural production, and, for this reason, the impossibility to study them as if they had been produced in a vacuum, because, somehow, "literature is transactional" (Spivak 228). In our globalized world, we seem to breathe in a world of worlds, juxtaposed cultures, systemic transfers, changes, contacts, and interferences. More than ever, we need a culture theoretical and critical reflection that accounts for the constant interweaving that shapes the semiosphere we live in. In this context, how do you read the ways polysystem theory has provoked response, especially in the fields of comparative literature and translation studies, which are, precisely, transcultural, transnational, translanguistic disciplines?

Itamar Even-Zohar: In recent years there seems to be some growing interest in polysystem theory. This has come mainly from countries where situations of heterogeneity are more visible, as it were, even to the untrained eye. There is also a recent surge of interest in China, which may be the result of a changing situation in the academic world there. So far, however, it has been mostly

people in literary and translation studies who have attempted to make use of the polysystem framework, so there is still much to be desired. Basically, however, polysystem theory, although first conceived to work for literature, developed to become a methodology for dealing with the larger range of complexity in culture. With it, I -- and several colleagues -- have also moved towards culture research. Unfortunately, during the years we have dedicated to working in culture research -- about fifteen years all in all -- it has not yet established itself as a consistently distinct discipline of research. This is why polysystem theory is only beginning to draw some attention beyond the group of researchers and students who are either connected with the Unit of Culture Research <<http://www.tau.ac.il/tarbut>> at Tel Aviv University or have moved independently in the same direction elsewhere. For me as a researcher and a theoretician what really matters is not whether my particular version called "polysystem theory" has made an impact or not, but whether the framework itself made explicit by polysystem theory has found its way to the work carried out in scholarship at large. I am referring here to the concept of *dynamics* on the one hand and that of *heterogeneity* on the other. In my view, the polysystem theory is just one possible set of hypotheses to deal with chaos and complexity without giving up the goal of formulating explanatory hypotheses within the philosophical framework of simplicity and economy. This means that whoever adopts a view of "dynamics plus heterogeneity" takes plausibly into account such parameters as change, conflict, contradiction, alternative options, competing possibilities, blurred borders between activities and institutions, and much more (see my 1997 paper "Factors and Dependencies in Culture" <<http://www.tau.ac.il/~itamarez/papers/fac-dep.htm>>), this in addition, naturally, to the idea of *interdependencies* (i.e., "systemicity") as the basis of any conceptualization of "the world."

Dora Sales Salvador: How would you define or describe in general terms the work which is being developed at the Unit for Culture Research? Is there a collective effort, the sense of being a group working together?

Itamar Even-Zohar: The Unit for Culture Research <<http://www.tau.ac.il/tarbut>> is a regular department of graduate studies at Tel Aviv University. It was founded in 1996 by a group consisting of my colleagues and myself. We decided to call it a "Unit" rather than a "Department" because for some time we wanted to experiment with a less rigid academic framework. As is the rule in any department, our students are requested to carry out research and present its results in their theses and dissertations. The faculty is also engaged in research in a variety of fields, not necessarily with any coordination among them. However, the conception of the field, which also finds its expression in the character of the teaching given at the Unit, is shared in principle by the faculty, although they need not adhere to any particular theory or research method. Our Website at <<http://www.tau.ac.il/tarbut>>, which contains some materials in English, too, can give some idea of the work carried out at the Unit.

Dora Sales Salvador: Your Ph.D. dissertation, *An Introduction to the Theory of Literary Translation* (1972), was somehow the matrix of your polysystem theory. When reading your essays, we, at least that's what happens to me, feel the need to explore that previous text to trace back your ideas, but unfortunately it seems to be unavailable. Have you thought about publishing it? In this respect, Gideon Toury has declared: "to my mind, the fact that it [Even-Zohar's Ph.D. Diss.] was never translated (from Hebrew) and was never published is an incredible mistake. By now there's no longer any point, but in 1972 or 1973, when he wrote it, it was extremely innovative and well worth publishing. It would probably have made a hell of a difference" (Toury qtd. in Shlesinger <<http://www.tau.ac.il/~tourney/interview.html>>). Well, I still see the point, indeed.

Itamar Even-Zohar: It was very generous of Gideon Toury to have said this. I am sure that my dissertation was for him an introduction to the field to which he later decided to dedicate his career. I am of course proud that I have been his mentor when he made his first steps. Actually, I was thinking at the time of publishing my dissertation, although in a revised and updated version. I even completed the revision, in English, of several chapters very short time after I had completed the Hebrew version, and had a contract for publishing the manuscript with a publisher in Amsterdam. However, I believe that in the course of the revision I gradually arrived at the conclusion, moving with the logics of the argumentation, that an adequate and powerful explanation of trans-

lation could not be achieved within the framework of "translation theory" of the type I was trying to develop in my original work. I therefore abandoned the project and invested my efforts in developing those directions I was beginning to glimpse at. The dissertation, or rather the most useful materials in it, has not been completely lost, since it has found its way into various papers of mine in subsequent years.

Dora Sales Salvador: Where would you locate the role of translation regarding the representation of cultures in our contemporary world, which wavers between the demarcation of cultural identities-particularities and global agendas? As the main "communicative route," as James Clifford would say?

Itamar Even-Zohar: Translation has always been a major way for contacts between peoples and one of the methods with which new cultures modeled themselves after more established ones. We have very solid materials about the nature and function of translation already from ancient Mesopotamia. There is not much to add to the universal knowledge about the importance of translation; however, translation in the narrow sense of re-writing texts between languages should not be taken to be the only, nor even always the major, channel for inter-groupal communication. Contacts, and subsequently interferences, use various channels, and translation is therefore only one parameter of what I have suggested to call "transfer" (in my 1979 paper, subsequently published in *Poetics Today* 1981 and in the collection of my papers in the 1990 thematic issue of *Poetics Today*). Viewed in this way, its function is not only in enlarging the supply of goods (texts being only one type of such goods), but mainly in creating new options for doing things. These aspects of import need still to be studied (see a brief presentation in my paper "The Making of Culture Repertoire and the Role of Transfer" *Target* 9.2 [1997]: 373-81, also available online at <http://www.tau.ac.il/~itamarez/papers/rep_trns.htm>).

Dora Sales Salvador: How would you describe the current position of literature within the polysystem of contemporary world wide culture, after much debate about the "death of the author," the "death of the novel," the "death of literature in the electronic age," and so on?

Itamar Even-Zohar: I am afraid I have no way for assessing that, *inter alia* because I have not done any research in the field of literature for years. "Literature" has had its ups and downs. At some points in history it played a most important role in some regions over the globe in contributing to the emergence of new cultures through the making of solidarized groups. At other points it was no more than a marginal entertainment, often of a rather stagnant nature. Today, it seems to play a lesser role in providing new repertoires than various fields of consumer culture. I have attempted a general overview of this relation between "literature" and "collective entities" in a relatively recent paper entitled "The Role of Literature in the Making of the Nations of Europe" (1993 <http://www.tau.ac.il/~itamarez/papers/rol_lit.html>).

Dora Sales Salvador: Regarding the integrative semiotic approach fostered by the polysystemic framework, you explained that "such an integration now becomes a precondition, a *sine qua non*, for an adequate understanding of any semiotic field. This means that standard language cannot be accounted for without putting it into the context of the non-standard varieties; literature for children would not be considered a phenomenon *sui generis*, but related to literature for adults; translated literature would not be disconnected from original literature; mass literary production (thrillers, sentimental novels, etc.) would not simply be dismissed as "non-literature in order to evade the recognition of its mutual dependence with 'individual' literature" (1990, 13). The dialectics between *strata* of culture, already advanced by Tynjanov and Shklovskij, and especially the relevance of popular strata, any "sub-culture" (popular literature, popular art, "low culture" in whatever sense, etc.) as cultural stimulation often resulting in a revitalization of the process of canonization and against the petrification of the canon together with the assumption that cultural products are not a priori canonical themselves but become canonized, could be related to many of the notions available in the field of cultural studies. So my question is whether you agree that there are many similarities between the framework of the polysystem theory and cultural studies and whether you perceive current scholarship traditional and conservative?

Itamar Even-Zohar: A very basic aspect of polysystem theory is the rejection of value judgments of culture and culture products. The hypothesis that no shift in a system can be accounted for

without a study of the dynamics of the system naturally makes it imperative to deal with peripheral, often covert, strata. From the point of view of culture research, "popular culture" is not a set of products and behaviors in connection with "the arts," but anything that does not conform to the official or institutionalized repertoire. Here, "Culture Research" is not identical with "Cultural Studies" because large parts of the latter are interested only in "the arts" and because they often are biased towards "lower strata" as an expression of protest against "the establishments." In Culture Research we attempt to avoid falling into the pitfalls of either "popular is authentic and true" or "popular is the degeneration of high values." As to conservatism or conformism in scholarship, I agree that more often than not the academe tends to conformism, but there are also exceptions. In the field of literary study, for example, allow me to mention the highly academic *Institute for the Study of Verbal Art* run by the group of the Russian Formalists between 1918 and 1924, where "popular culture" and its relations to "high culture" was among the most studied topics. So academic conservatism is perhaps a matter of time and place. At Tel Aviv University, much work has been done on this, too, with explicit reference to popular music and its institutionalization. Among the members of the Unit for Culture Research, you will find various works by Zohar Shavit on children's literature (and youth culture at large), and Rakefet Sela-Sheffy on various aspects of "the popular" (various works by both are also available from their respective Websites (Shavit <<http://www.tau.ac.il/~zshavit/elct-pl.html>>; Sela-Sheffy <<http://www.tau.ac.il/~rakefet>>).

Dora Sales Salvador: As we know, cultural studies has emerged as a separate field of interdisciplinary study during the past three decades, initially in Britain (with the works of Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams, among others), with more or less explicit and committed links to the left, and more recently in the United States and other countries. The routes that have led to the formation of cultural studies with scholars coming from diverse fields brought about a variety of theoretical frameworks, taxonomies, and methodologies. The way I see it, one of the clearest differences between the polysystem theory and cultural studies is that the latter is not a monolithic body of theories and methods, but a field made up of multiple discourses, with a common object of study, namely culture understood as the texts and practices of everyday life (see, e.g., Storey), and thus with a special -- although it is not the only one -- focus on the study of popular culture. Also, two of the main foci of cultural studies are the analysis of the social and historical conditions of production and consumption and the belief that societies are divided unequally along, for example, ethnic, gender, generation, and class axes. (How) would you relate your own work in cultural research and that of the polysystemic frame with cultural studies in terms of contact points and/or divergences?

Itamar Even-Zohar: Most of the aspects you attribute to cultural studies are already present in the various stages of what I call "Dynamic Functionalism": the major points are discussed in my 1997 paper "Factors and Dependencies in Culture" <<http://www.tau.ac.il/~itamarez/papers/fac-dep.htm>>. In short, cultural studies were not a necessary tool of liberation, as it were, for people like myself who have been working with the ideas of such researchers as Bogatyrev, Lotman, or Voloshinov on the one hand, and with those of Sapir, Malinowski, Bourdieu, or Hofstede on the other, to mention just a few names. Moreover, while cultural studies in Britain has crystallized as a discipline whose scholars were interested in carrying out research in order to get some understanding of the way society works, in other countries, especially in some parts of the United States, it has deteriorated -- from my biased point of view -- to become a politically correct bundle of attitudes of resentment (as Marc Angenot has called them). The term "culture research" had therefore to be coined specifically in order to distinguish our approach to doing work from the approach of those who mostly wish to engage in criticizing the society where they live, in want of any other powerful public channels (a situation which characterizes the powerlessness of the "intellectuals" in the United States, in comparison with most other Western societies). There had to be made a distinction between analyzing culture as organizing life on a variety of levels and the other practices: on the one hand -- the interpretative method, and on the other -- the practice that is not interested in developing hypotheses for research, but in promoting discourse about certain "topics," "ideas," or "concepts," which are declared to be "relevant" or "irrelevant" in advance (depending on their compliance with some ideological posi-

tions). On a general level, polysystem theory is not a field or a discipline such as cultural studies or culture research but a theoretical framework albeit with an extensive range of parameters.

Dora Sales Salvador: Altogether, polysystem theory serves as a very rich theoretical structure for the understanding of bicultural or transcultural literatures. Given the current intensity of the debate, the rapid developments and hegemonic position of some trends of contemporary literary critical theory in the West, eg., *postmodernism*, I believe that it is indeed important to examine the applicability of these theoretical structures and modalities outside the cultural tradition which produced them, which is basically the Western one. In this respect, the advantage afforded by the polysystem theory lies in its descriptive (not prescriptive) semiotic nature, very useful for any cross-cultural reading.

Itamar Even-Zohar: Since the idea of the polysystem refers, basically, to dynamics and heterogeneity, it allows conceptualizing many different and divergent instances of cultural strata. Intercultural, cross-cultural, and intra-cultural dynamics are indispensable dimensions of any polysystemic approach. Unlike postmodernist theories, its point of departure is not ideological. This makes it a better tool for dealing with many varieties of complex situations.

Dora Sales Salvador: Claudio Guillén stated that literary genres, at least in Western literature, have always tended to constitute systems (131). Would you agree with the idea that literary genres have indeed never been frontiers and sharp demarcations between forms, but borderlands, contact zones, on-going structures and models? If so, this would be a fruitful point of departure dealing with the contemporary emergence of transcultural literatures coming from places formerly colonized. Spaces where a culture that brought interference by dominance -- in spite of the target system's resistance, as you say in your paper "Laws of Cultural Interference"

<<http://www.tau.ac.il/~itamarez/papers/culture-interference.htm>> -- arrived to import or to enforce forms and models that did not exist in that cultural system before and which may assume a different function within the target, for instance contesting that imposed model and reshaping it. I am thinking, for instance, about how, in the last decades, Asian, African, or Amerindian cultures, primarily oral, are producing novels that are providing new structures and narrative modes to the history of the genre.

Itamar Even-Zohar: The transfer, both export and import, of products and models for organizing life has been a major process of all human societies since time immemorial. Literary genres, whether as models -- i.e., ready-made clusters of items of repertoire -- or as institutions, have been only one such instance of transfer. Transfers could be multi-directional, bi-directional, or uni-directional in various periods and in various territories, so there is nothing exceptional or extraordinary in the penetration of Asian or African models into Western repertoires. We believe that we are more aware of such transfers today, but I am not sure that those transfers which took place in late eighteenth-century Europe did not attract more attention, which consisted of either enthusiasm or rejection.

Dora Sales Salvador: For a truly interdisciplinary perspective on culture research, such as the one provided by the polysystem theory with its open-minded descriptive dynamism, I consider that it is absolutely relevant the development of vertical reading, to be willing to read outside one's specific area, to accept what other disciplines can teach us, that is, to carry out a real transverse reading across borders between established fields (literature, anthropology, sociology, history, etc.) in order to promote a better understanding of culture, its relations and productions, as the only way towards an integrative and comprehensive cultural theory. Would you please comment on this?

Itamar Even-Zohar: I could not agree more with your point of view. Indeed, the strong integrative nature of culture research is one of its major advantages in comparison with disciplines where people are so locked up in their domestic traditions that they seldom look at what is going on in other fields. It is most unfortunate that the movement for the unification of science (e.g., the Chicago School) has lost its impetus after World War II. The semiotics movement began working in that direction during the first years of its renaissance in the 1960s, but soon fell into a dead lock or a loop that did not allow going beyond the very basic concepts of the classification of signs towards an understanding of sign systems as non-abstract interdependencies which are socially embedded. Scholars in culture research must follow what is going on in a host of "contributing disciplines" in

order to re-assess repeatedly their methods, positions, and hypotheses.

Dora Sales Salvador: In a recent essay, "The Literary in Theory," Jonathan Culler reflects on the present state of literary theory, where the *literary* has not been indeed the focus of *theory*. Culler remembers that, in general terms, at certain moments the *literariness* of literature was a question any theorist had to address because this was the animating focus, although in recent poststructuralist trends, such as new historicism (which is related to cultural studies), there has been a transfer of interest from the literary text itself to the literary work understood in a socio-historical context. Culler agrees with what we could name the "cultural turn" of literary theory, but the point is that he posits that perhaps it is also time to "reground the literary in literature" (290), with a critical edge, because, after much debate, what is left of theory is precisely the literary. Behind this, what I see is the need to integrate, I mean, to take into account the cultural context in which a literary work is born and processed, but without forgetting the literary work itself. In this sense, the polysystemic descriptive framework is a very profitable integrative stage from which the scholar and critic of literature is able to analyze the functioning of the literary system as well as the literary products of that system. I agree with the anthropologist Clifford Geertz for whom the only way to prevent that the cultural analysis may lose contact with the reality of the texts explored consists in placing and developing the analysis of those realities right at the beginning; so the point is to go beyond a text-centered focus, but without forgetting the texts themselves. Would you agree that this is what the polysystemic approach aims to do?

Itamar Even-Zohar: The trouble is that some "literary critics" have never recognized that "literature" is not an a-historical "given," but a socio-cultural institution, a people-made industry that managed to produce, at least in some periods of history although not in other, valued goods as well as models for organizing or managing life that far transcended the "reading" of the written text. A current mistake of many theoreticians in the humanities and social sciences lies in their taking for granted the objects of study they select just because some of these have managed to establish themselves as social institutions at one time or another. In contrast, a socio-cultural approach to "literature" can suggest that we distinguish between the inner history of the industry (such as the ways certain repertoires/models have emerged, crystallized, and gone away) and the relation of that industry to the aggregate of options which have organized society. If one is not interested in dimensions that go beyond the description of repertoires used by the literary industry along history, one is not likely to offer any adequate explanation of that industry. Basically, it must be admitted that "the literary" is no more than a belief (the that the producers of texts have produced for their products). I therefore fully agree with you here, too, that studying "literature" as a phenomenon *sui generis* does not lead far beyond rehashed "explanations of texts," which tend to re-inforce various beliefs promoted by the industry itself.

Dora Sales Salvador: All in all, your concepts of heterogeneity and cultural interference are extremely helpful in order to understand culture and social relations with an open mind, away from fetish conceptions and monolithic myths of identity. Thus, it is very important to recognize the relevance of heterogeneity as a motoric impulse in the dynamics of culture. In this respect, I would like to refer to the multicultural and multilingual complexities of any society, as you say, in your paper "The Making of Repertoire, Survival and Success under Heterogeneity" (2000): "The problem of the limits of heterogeneity and its repercussions for the survival and success of groups is in fact one of the most burning practical problems of modern socio-political entities today" (48). Would you agree that most on-going conflicts in the world would not exist if people could see that intercultural-intersystemic transfer is able to enrich culture and would, as such, promote understanding between cultures?

Itamar Even-Zohar: I wish I had an answer to this question, but I am afraid I have no idea of what would reduce human conflicts. After all, conflicts are built-in occurrences in any social (human or other) group. They may sometimes create "positive competition," and some other times destruction and hostility. It may be assumed, however, that a better understanding of conflicts in their specific contexts may lead to reducing their destructive results. There is much one can learn here from the works of such as Geert Hofstede (who has founded the *Institute for Research on Intercultural Cooperation*, where conflicts research is a focus of study) or Kevin Avruch (see his *Culture*

and Conflict Resolution).

Dora Sales Salvador: Do you have the feeling of being or having been located at a peripheral place in the big arena of literary theory, dominated by the American and French academies? I am also thinking about other contributions, such as that provided by the Tartu school, or even Bakhtin, whose works were recovered for the mainstream rather recently. In other words, is there a polysystemic explanation that could clarify why some theories and theorists seem to be at the center, while other very valuable contributions dwell in a periphery? What about literary theories coming from Eastern cultures, theories that are ignored broadly?

Itamar Even-Zohar: It would take us too far to try and explain why advanced methodologies, such as those proposed by Russian Formalism at the dawn of the twentieth century, have never become mainstream approaches anywhere. In the case of Russian Formalism, even when it was supposedly acknowledged in the West, it could not fit into any extant framework and therefore was always reduced to schematic barebones. It seems that the need for a "scientific" study of literature has never appealed to people engaged and involved with this industry. The intellectual procedures they have been using have never arrived at a stage when one step would generate another. Rather, one step tended to replace another, thus changing completely the perspective on an arbitrary basis, by the rules of fashion shifts. I suspect that even Bakhtin has never been really "recovered," as you say, because the whole mindset, the rules of the game employed by Bakhtin, have been alien to those enchanted by some of his ideas. So his work has been dismembered, like that of the Russian Formalists, to various "ideas," instead of being transformed into analytical and investigational tools which allow using his platform as a *point of departure* rather than as a *final station*. Of course, this course of events is not an exceptional in the domain of the migration of theories. No doubt the relations between options proposed in some "center" and some "periphery" are perfect subjects of study for a polysystemic approach. But, in contradistinction to the exact sciences, there is no paradigm accepted universally in the humanities and social sciences, one that would locate unequivocally where the "center" lies. To be only marginally -- or not at all -- recognized by American, English, or French students of literature does not make one's work obsolete the way it might make one's work in physics or medicine, for instance. And, in accordance with the classical "rule of peripheries," there is always an attempt at some periphery to dislodge fashions dictated by some hegemonical centers. Such peripheries may naturally be more attentive to alternatives.

Dora Sales Salvador: Indeed. Your 1990 *Polysystem Studies* was mostly a revision of your 1978 *Papers in Historical Poetics* and now you are preparing a new volume. While most literary and culture theorists attempt to cover a wide range of issues and research a broad scope of topics, showing off how much they know depending on the "pop star" of the moment (e.g., structuralism, deconstruction, postmodernism, etc.), I believe that, to a certain extent, you have focused your work on the effort to improve, update, and enlarge your notions in polysystem theory. By this, your contribution is not at all a smaller one, quite the contrary, it seems to me it is an instance of coherence and responsibility, and the only way in which research can really advance, by testing and challenging itself.

Itamar Even-Zohar: I feel a bit awkward about this, because scholars have often criticized me for not developing, in their opinion, the polysystem theory sufficiently and for having moved to doing work on other issues. My own assessment is that I have done very little in terms of re-writing the main body of polysystem theory, basically because I thought it will not be improved by re-writing again and again its basics, but by venturing into questions it can suggest to consider. Those new questions, to which I had no clue before, probably could not have emerged without the polysystem conceptual background. Nevertheless, my 1990 collection was probably my last and farewell contribution to a project of studies where literature as such figured as the main character, so to speak, and since 1993 I have moved to dealing with a project where "literature" is not even present (as you can see from the papers posted at <<http://www.tau.ac.il/~itamarez/>>). For example, the topic you are referring to, namely the relations between the nature of a culture and the prospects of the collective entity which lives by it to survive, can naturally be conceived of and analyzed in the broad parameters of the dynamics-heterogeneity ("polysystemic") perspective, but no previous stage in my work had provided me with the necessary tools for dealing with this topic

successfully. A new project had to be set up for this, one where the polysystemic perspective was not the central dimension, although it remained, naturally, in the background as an indispensable basis. In short, since many years I do not consider myself working on improving the polysystem theory as such, but rather have been attempting to venture into various questions for which this theory is the basis while it no longer even requires an explicit reference.

Dora Sales Salvador: Professor Even-Zohar, let me finish with a rather personal question that, nevertheless, I consider interesting in order to get to know the person behind the theorist. Which are your favourite literary readings, the texts or authors you have enjoyed most as a reader?

Itamar Even-Zohar: Having read so much literature, I am afraid that I can think of very few texts to which I can still go back from time to time. Perhaps I can think of works of Gogol, of few stories from the old Hebrew literature (including in the Hebrew bible), of the Mesopotamian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, or of the mediaeval Icelandic sagas, and perhaps in particular the *Saga of Gisli Son of Sur*, a powerful and unforgettable text. And thank you very much for your elaborate, thorough, and kind questions.

Dora Sales Salvador: Many thanks to you for sharing your thoughts so generously and I am looking forward to reading your new work.

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Note: Dora Sales Salvador acknowledges funding received for the research of "In Conversation with Itamar Even-Zohar about Literary and Culture Theory" from Generalitat Valenciana (File FPI00-07-210) and she would like to express her gratitude to Itamar Even-Zohar for his kindness, generosity, and time, and her thanks to CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture for publishing the interview. □

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